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Carol X Weakley 10/18/2006 02:47:58 PM From DB/Inbox: Carol X Weakley

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Text:

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 04111

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ACTION: POL
INFO: RES DAO ADM RSO CONS AMB AID PD IMO ECON IPSC
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DISSEMINATION: POL
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: CDA:GCRETZ
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INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 004111

SIPDIS

NSC FOR WATERS/DORAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/16/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: DRUZE ELDERS: TIRED OF BEING TAKEN FOR GRANTED,
WARN OF RISING EXTREMISM AMONG YOUTH

Classified By: CDA Gene Cretz for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. During a meeting October 6, Druze leaders told PolCouns and poloffs that after almost sixty years, Druze loyalty to Israel had still not been rewarded. They cautioned that unless conditions in their communities improved soon, young Druze would begin sliding toward extremism. They also criticized the GOI for appointing "illiterate judges" to the Druze religious court, and appealed for U.S. help to ensure the safety of Walid Jumblatt in Lebanon. The Druze elders urged the U.S. to recognize the Druze as a force of moderation and tolerance in the Middle East, and, despite their complaints, suggested that the Druze in Israel were a living example of democratic coexistence.
END SUMMARY.

DEMAND FOR EQUALITY

¶2. (C) PolCouns and poloffs met October 6 with prominent Druze community leaders in the Mt. Carmel region of the Galilee to discuss their concerns about the future of the Druze community in Israel. Hosted by retired Israeli diplomat and former MK Zeidan Atashi, the gathering included a cross-section of the Druze elite -- politicians, businessmen, lawyers, academics and retired IDF officers. Saying that &as a sect and a community, we are frustrated,8 they warned that the Druze in Israel were nearing a tipping point, because after decades of &absolute loyalty8 to the state, the Druze were still not afforded the same opportunities as their Jewish compatriots despite their service to the State of Israel. &We gave the Israeli,s sixty years and are tired of waiting for equality,8 one

retired Druze Colonel and veteran of the wars of 1967, 1973 and 1982 said, adding that the GOI only remembers the Druze when their service is required in war.

LACK OF STATE INVESTMENT IN DRUZE AREAS

13. (C) The Druze leaders complained that GOI investment in education and development in their communities was not sufficient, and, as a result, Druze youth were becoming increasingly disillusioned with the state. For example, the Druze commented on GOI efforts to promote investment in industrial zones in nearby Jewish communities, such as Carmiel. No comparable state-directed effort had been given to the Druze communities. In fact, some GOI policies, such as the QIZ textile programs between Israel, Egypt and Jordan, had actually resulted in greater unemployment among Druze women, who had previously worked in textile factories in northern Israel. At stake, they said, is nothing less than the future loyalty of the Druze in Israel.

FRUSTRATION COULD FUEL EXTREMISM

14. (C) Without greater equality and more opportunities, young Druze were beginning to question military service and to reject the traditional Druze value of loyalty to the society in which they live. This would be a very dangerous shift, they warned, and would lead to marginalization and extremism. They noted that Islamic extremist propaganda was already beginning to make inroads in their communities and that a few young Druze had already begun sliding in that direction. Former (Likud) MK Asad Asad, a retired Colonel in the IDF, claimed that Druze participation in recent elections had declined significantly, as had support for parties such as Likud and Kadima.

NO POLITICAL PATRON FOR THE DRUZE

15. (C) The Druze elders expressed concern that unlike previous generations of Israeli leaders, the new Russian-speaking political class had no history with the Druze and thus no tradition of cooperation and compromise. The rise of the Russians will not be good for the Druze, they predicted. They cited this as another example of why time is running out for the Druze to achieve a greater measure of equality in Israel. "Our situation is worse than that of other minorities in Israel. The Druze are not important to Olmert, Peres or Peretz," Asad Asad claimed, adding that while many Israeli Jewish politicians paid lip service to Druze equality, only the late Yitzhak Rabin had actually delivered on his promises.

WE ARE THE MODERATES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

16. (C) Fadil Mansour, a Druze elder, emphasized that the Druze community in Israel was an example of the type of moderates the U.S. was looking for in the Middle East: "Here is where democracy is. The Druze are against religious extremism." Alluding positively to U.S. support for Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Mansour urged similar support for the Druze community in Israel. "If the U.S. succeeds in promoting democracy and equality for Israel's Arab communities, this will contribute to your efforts to combat anti-Israel and anti-U.S. views in the broader Middle East."

STATE MEDDLING IN DRUZE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

17. (C) Mansour, however, complained that the GOI had interfered in the organization of the Druze religious institutions by picking "illiterate judges" to serve in a

Druze religious court. He also warned that the GOI should not interfere in Druze religious organizations, and bemoaned what he claimed was an unfair denial of "open religious councils" by the GOI. Comment: Our Druze interlocutors did not appear to have a favorable view of the lone Druze MK currently serving in the Knesset, Majalli Wahbee. Mansour attributed the court-packing responsibility to the MOJ, acting upon the recommendation of this MK. End Comment.

PERSPECTIVES ON SYRIA AND LEBANON

18. (C) Despite their complaints about the GOI, our Druze interlocutors argued that Israeli Arabs had benefited far more over the past fifty years (of Israeli rule) than the preceding 500 years (of Ottoman rule). Unlike other Arabs, however, the Druze have no "land issues" like Jerusalem or even the Golan with the Jewish State, according to one Druze businessman. In a separate conversation over lunch with the Kadima-allied Druze mayor of Dalit El Carmel and Usfia, Dr. Akram Hasson, poloffs heard an earful of criticism about Bashar al-Asad's regime. Dr. Hasson privately disparaged the possibility of an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement as long as dictatorship prevailed in Syria. The Druze leaders also repeated a request made by Atashi in a meeting with the Ambassador on March 8 (when Walid Jumblatt was traveling to the U.S.), that the U.S. do whatever it could to ensure Jumblatt's safety. They stressed that they were still very concerned about his safety in Lebanon.

19. (U) NOTE: Hasson estimated the number of Druze in Israel at about 100,000, significantly smaller than Druze communities in Lebanon and Syria. While Israeli Druze enjoy legal equality and perform the same military service as Israeli Jews, the Druze elders complained that their communities had fewer educational opportunities and higher unemployment.

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